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No 471 30 May 2018 50p/£1

Defend free movement! Oppose Brexit!

LABOUR AND BREXIT: MEMBERS MUST DECIDE

In response to the continuing fiascos and scandals about the shape of Brexit, the Labour Party is edging towards a "less-Brexit" stance. But it remains evasive.

Labour members and trade unionists must be able to debate this out at Labour conference on 23-26 September this year.

The labour movement needs a policy debated through the ranks, not just "managed" by self-accredited sages and scribblers in the Leader's Office. Only then can it have ideas which it can take out to the unorganised and the wavering voters, to convince them.

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Students plan Trump walk-outs



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The roots of left antisemitism



John O'Mahony traces the 1980s influx of antisemitism into the British left.

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Join Labour!

RMT debates
Labour Party
affiliation

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Star says: trust the Tories, trust the League

By Rhodri Evans

Editorials in the *Morning Star* on 23 May showed what wretched depths the *Star* is brought to by its Europhobia.

The *Morning Star*, continuation of the old Stalinist lie-sheet the *Daily Worker*, is much faded journalistically, but still gets money from some union leaders: the 23 May issues boasts of subsidies from PCS, Unison, and Unite. It has some influence in Momentum.

No, says the first editorial, there is no risk of the return of a “hard” Irish border. A report by MEPs has proposed a “smart border”. “Technology” can do the trick. Which is just what the Tories say.

The *Star* feels a need to concede that the prospective coalition government in Italy of the hard-right

League and demagogic Five Star is unsavoury and “hostile to refugees”. But the main message of its second editorial is that “fundamental democratic and national [?] principle” means it should have its way.

Those who are anxious about the chauvinist coalition are so really only because it may increase public spending and dispute EU rules.

It looks now as if Italy will have a new election in August. The *Star* claims that the alternative to the League-Five-Star team is “an unelected technocratic regime”.

In fact the candidate for prime minister of the League and Five Star was Giuseppe Conte, not even a technocrat but an unelected law professor with a dodgy CV.

Students: unite and renew the student movement

By Workers' Liberty students

The conference of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts is being held in Sheffield on 8-10 June.

The conference follows a series of important industrial disputes in education — for lecturers’ pensions and against the destruction of further education — from which the National Union of Students has been shamefully absent. Those disputes form the background for our discussions.

A groundswell of solidarity from local student activist groups, Labour Clubs and others showed meaningful support for the strike where the NUS failed. This needs to be built on.

We need to renew and unite the student movement on a clear political basis. Loyalty to cliques or electoral factions is no substitute for unity around ideas and demands.

We need a student movement whose representatives, especially those who say they are on the left, are supported, but also tested, by a strong grassroots movement. Instead we have had from some quarters vagueness about politics (combined with stern demands for personal loyalty). Such actions are those of an unaccountable leadership.

We need open argument about politics, and for those politics to be put to the test in action. Motions passed in support of strikes at NUS conferences and student union councils are no good if the elected leaders of the student movement

feel justified in ignoring them.

The student movement needs to unite not only around the demand for free education and an end to marketisation.

It also needs to give a voice to the widely-shared pro-migrant sentiment of young people who reject Brexit’s racist undertow.

It needs to unite around demands for democratic campuses, to in a ban on police entering the university without permission (as in many countries around the world); where students are not monitored under the Prevent programme; and where freedom to speak and organise is protected.

The student left needs to be an active participant in class struggles in the education sector, not pontificate from the sidelines.

Student unions, not just this or that activist group, should throw their institutional weight behind demands for the living wage, a 5:1 pay ratio on campus, and for all student workers to be unionised. Demands for rent caps, for free childcare for staff and students, need to be part of this as well.

Such a programme of political and democratic demands should be extended to local students’ unions, and other mass organisations like Labour Students.

Such a programme can clear the way for action — demonstrations, protests, campaigns — which can draw in new activists and renew the student movement. And for that, we need the student left to unite on a principled, clear basis.

• bit.ly/8-10june

The landed plutocracy

By Martin Thomas

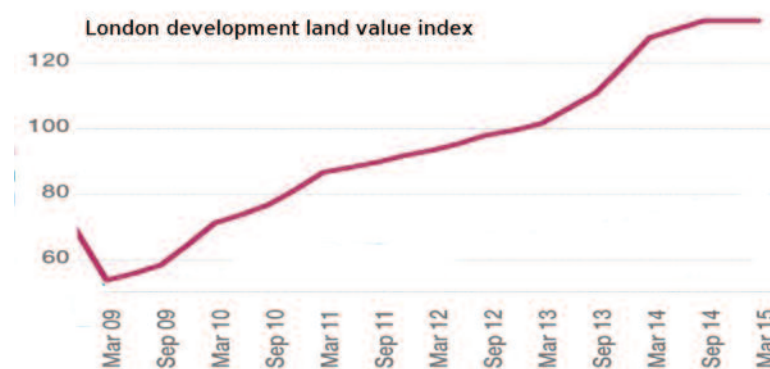
The Crown, the Church, and five aristocratic estates with a collective wealth of £22 billion still own a thousand acres of central London’s residential building land.

The wealthiest of the private landowners are the Duke of Westminster, Earl Cadogan, Viscount Portman, Baroness Howard de Walden, and the Duke of Bedford.

The “Who Owns England” blog has dug into the records — official statistics are very patchy — and reckons that the Crown, the Church, and 14 private estates own around 1,453 acres of central London, or about 600 hectares (bit.ly/land-own).

At rates of £50 to £90 million per hectare — most of that land is in central London, where land prices are highest — that is £30 to £50 billion. The landowners get hundreds of millions each year in “ground rent” (a component of rent paid to the owner of the land, not to the, usually different, owner of the building) and the certainty of an increase in their wealth without the least effort on their part. At any time they can cash in by selling a bit of their land.

Expropriating the big landowners, or a milder measure like taxing their wealth gains from land-price



rises, would not solve the problem of house prices spiralling out of proportion to incomes. But it would help.

The early-19th century economist David Ricardo, whom Marx regarded highly, believed that in a capitalist society rents on land must tend to rise faster than wages or even profits, and would eventually, by squeezing those incomes, reduce capitalism to stagnation.

Actually, for reasons partly but not entirely uncovered in Marx’s critique of Ricardo on this question, something like the opposite has happened. Land was a big part of total private wealth until late in the 19th century, but it has relatively declined over the long term to a small part today. Only not a negligible part.

Ground rents have generally been fixed for a long period, 99

years, or 999 years. Between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and World War 1, the general price level was fairly stable long-term, about 100 times the level today. Between World War One and today it has increased 100-fold; between World War Two and today, 40-fold.

Some ground rents have been so diminished by inflation that the landowners do not even bother to collect them. Landowners have sold off their land bit by bit, and most residential land is now publicly-owned.

Now landowners are trying to claw back. Many deals say that ground rents will double every twenty years, or, more recently, even every ten years. Some say that ground rents will rise in line with RPI. Ground rent is re-emerging as a significant drain.

Expropriate the landowners!

Organise to protest Trump visit

By a student activist

Activists in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts are planning to join the mass protests that will greet Trump’s arrival in the UK on 13 July.

For young people, and school and college-age students especially, Trump is a particularly menacing figure because he threatens to annihilate the future world that the young will inherit. His fight against efforts to stop climate change; his reckless nuclear grandstanding; and his support for closed borders and migrant-hunting all promise to create a darker and more dangerous world in decades to come.

In the USA, Trump’s callous dis-

regard for the victims of school shootings and his flippant, absurd comments about arming teachers led to a movement of mass school walk outs by school students, protesting his arrogance and calling for gun controls.

We think that when Trump visits the UK, school and college students should take a lead from American young people and, where possible, organise walk outs on Friday 13 July ahead of the larger national protests on Saturday 14 July.

The movement of protest against Trump should not just be about denouncing the evils of Trump’s own politics, but about building a movement based on positive slogans, that can offer a genuine alternative to the populist right wing.



A movement that trumpets free movement, migrants’ rights, feminism, curbing the power of the rich and action to halt climate change.

Once left wing, now corrupt

By Gerry Bates

At least 83 protesters have been killed so far as Nicaragua’s once-left-wing president Daniel Ortega deploys police and troops against street demonstrations and blockades demanding his resignation.

The protests first exploded in mid-April against Ortega’s plan to increase workers’ social-security

benefits and cut pensions. On 22 April, Ortega retreated on that.

Protests have continued. They reached a new high on the weekend 26-27 May, after talks mediated by the Catholic Church broke down.

Ortega’s main bases of support have been the bosses’ group COSEP (Superior Council of Private Enterprise), the military, and some sectors of the poorest dependent on government welfare

payments. COSEP and the military are now taking their distance.

The opposition has been spearheaded by students, and had support from better-off workers. The reports available to us don’t suggest it is specially left-wing.

The events demonstrate the impasse of governments which try to be left-wing by “clever” manipulation from above within the constraints of neoliberalism.

Italy: Salvini sets the pace

By Hugh Edwards

Italian President Sergio Mattarella has refused to confirm the appointment of Euro-critic Paola Savona as Minister of Finance in the new coalition government of the populist Five Star Movement and the Lega Nazionale.

With Mattarella's decision (taken, he said, "to save the constitution") and the subsequent resignation of the newly-appointed Prime Minister, the obscure Professor Conte, the government has collapsed.

As the markets took fright after the government's fall, the cost of financing Italy's two trillion dollar public debt has risen alarmingly, to its highest point since 2014. Mattarella, like many of his predecessors, immediately summoned an ex-IMF financial wizard to serve as a "neutral" Prime Minister, charged with bringing to life a government of similar experts to soothe the markets before the inevitable elections sometime in Autumn.



Conte ousted, crisis sparked

In 2011 the Berlusconi government was similarly turfed out from office (via the intervention of another "neutral" President, Giorgio Napolitano) amidst a similar financial crisis. But that was then, when the bi-partisan political landscape was occupied by another major mass centre-left party, solid and

united, and backed by the country's leading trade union confederations: the Democratic Party, tried and trusted "responsible" defenders of the capitalist social order in moments like this, as they proved once more over the blitzkrieg of austerity launched by the Mario Monte government "to save the na-

tion".

Now that landscape has changed utterly, and unlike Berlusconi in 2011, neither the reactionary, xenophobic and racist National League of Matteo Salvini nor Luigi Di Maio's Five Star Movement have any intention of "responsibly" underwriting the desperate efforts of the individual who kicked them out of office.

Di Maio has called for the President's impeachment, while Salvini, as befits someone politically and personally on first-name terms with the fascists of Casa Pound and Forza Nuova, has invoked a "march on Rome", if immediate elections are not held.

In the present atmosphere any election called by Mattarella, even if it might calm the markets and restore some degree of political stability, would inevitably see an even larger majority for the populist

duo, this time with a triumph for the Lega and Salvini. Since the election, Salvini has been the dominant and more calculating in terms of pace, direction and dynamic of his tactics. He arrogantly warned Berlusconi that if he voted for the President's proposed Prime Minister, the alliance of Forza Italia and La Lega would be finished.

Similarly Salvini has promised that if returned to power as Minister of the Interior, he will launch a huge programme of deportations of "illegal" immigrants.

He also promises a massive increase in detention centres (which were set up by the first centre-left Romano Prodi government, then expanded by the first Berlusconi regime, whose repressive regime was "aimed at criminals, mendicants, and skivers young and old").

Macron: next big protest 2 June

By Michael Elms

On 26 May, the mass mobilisations against French President Emmanuel Macron's anti-social reforms continued, with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets in demonstrations billed as a "popular tide".

Macron wants to cut jobs on the rails, close rural branch lines, break up the state rail company and make it easier for employers in the transport sector to hire workers on insecure, low-paid contracts. These reforms come alongside a raft of other attacks, on education and health in particular.

The demonstrations came on the back of an internal referendum conducted in the state railway company, the SNCF, by trade unions. Of 150,000 employees, 90,000 voted in the referendum, with 95% voting to reject Macron's reforms. Laurent



Brun, the general secretary of the CGT-rail union, explained the meaning of the referendum, saying: "The management says that 'since three quarters of the railway workers are not on strike, three quarters of the workers support the reforms...' In my opinion, the re-

sponse will be overwhelming, but we will see."

Currently the French unions are organising two days of strikes across transport and other public services in every five. The next big national demonstration has been called for 2 June.

New Gaza violence likely on 5 June

By Colin Foster

On Tuesday 29 May the Israeli military launched new air strikes on Gaza, after mortar rounds were fired from Gaza into Israel.

The Israeli military said they had targeted Islamic Jihad and Hamas bases, but one bomb fell in a kindergarten playground, not killing anyone. None of the mortar

rounds reached Israeli targets.

Hamas, the Islamic clerical-fascist group which rules Gaza, has given some signals that it currently wants to get a temporary deal for economic relief, rather than military escalation. Islamic Jihad, rather than Hamas, may have fired the mortar rounds.

However, Hamas has called for renewed protests near the Israeli

border on 5 June. Israel's right-wing government remains truculent.

It is building a fortified breakwater, topped with barbed wire, in the sea a few kilometres north of Gaza, to further hem in Gaza.

The whole situation in the Middle East, after Trump's withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, remains tense and close to war.

The Other Voice

Adam Keller reports on grassroots solidarity at the Israel-Gaza border

The Other Voice is a movement founded by Israelis living in the town of Sderot and other locations near to the Gaza Strip border.

The aim of The Other Voice is to reach out to the Gaza Palestinians, to promote peaceful dialogue and call for an end to the siege of the Gaza Strip and the occupation and oppression of the Palestinians in general.

Members of The Other Voice maintain ongoing personal contacts with Gaza Strip Palestinians, unbroken even in periods of high tensions, violence and bloodshed.

It is virtually impossible to have face-to-face meetings since Gaza Palestinians are virtually never allowed to enter Israel and Israeli citizens similarly forbidden to enter Gaza; still, it is possible to maintain contact, across the high physical and mental barriers, by phone and the net.

The activities of "The Other Voice" are far from easy, in the Gaza border area there live some aggressive nationalists. Expressing peace-oriented opinions in this environment is more difficult than in the (relatively) liberal Tel Aviv. Still, the activists persist in holding weekly vigils every Friday at the Yad Mordechai Junction, a short distance north of the Erez Checkpoint at the (blocked) entrance to the Gaza Strip.

The junction is bustling with traffic, both civilians and soldiers en route to the Gaza border, and activists are highly visible when

they raise placards and banners with such slogans as "End the Violence — rebuild Gaza!" and "On Both Sides of the Border, Children Want to Live!"

There are sympathetic reactions from passers-by and motorists, but also some highly hostile ones, including several instances of physical violence.

Members of "The Other Voice" are not deterred by any such ugly incidents, and are determined to raise their voice, The Other Voice in very truth, as high as possible. For the Israeli Peace Movement as a whole, this voice is of special importance — since Israelis who live in the close proximity of the Gaza border have a special moral authority position in the Israeli society, as being those who will likely personally bear the dire results of any new violent flareup.

Their outspoken call, to halt the violence and oppression and solve the deep humanitarian and political problems of Gaza has a greater resonance than a call by Israelis living elsewhere.

Expressions of solidarity and goodwill, made by people worldwide, are highly appreciated and strengthening. You can help by raising the issue in your own country, reaching out to decision-makers and the general public opinion. Relations between Israelis and Palestinians have long since stopped being their own exclusive concern.

People and governments from all over the world are involved — and should be involved in the right way.

• othervoice.org/infoeng/about-us.htm

Bastani: why won't you debate Brexit?

THE LEFT

By Keith Road

Aaron Bastani, co-founder of online news platform Novara Media, has responded to an article in the *Guardian* on 26 May about calls for a debate on Brexit at the 2018 Labour conference... by trying to witch-hunt the AWL.

The article quotes three anti-Brexit Momentum members in support of the call for a debate.

On Twitter Bastani accuses the AWL of being behind a "plot" with the Labour right to destabilise the Corbyn leadership through a debate on Brexit policy.

To build up his ludicrous picture of an AWL plot, Bastani says Rida Vaquas, one of the activists quoted in the *Guardian*, is a member of the AWL. Rida has written articles for many publications, including *Solidarity* (but also the *New Statesman*). A glance at her output would reveal that she does not share Workers' Liberty's politics on quite a few issues. However, unlike Bastani, Rida does value democracy — hence her support for a conference debate.

Worse than not taking a young activist seriously enough to read her opinions, it is clear that Bastani wants to get her, and the also-quoted Omar Raii (who is a supporter of Workers' Liberty), excluded from the Labour Party.

He has misrepresented our policy on the Labour Campaign for a Single Market. To be

clear, the AWL is neither a part of, nor do we back, the LCSM.

Do both we and the LCSM want to see Brexit debated? Yes! Two years after the referendum on UK membership of the EU, there is a lot to discuss. In the first place, whether or not Labour should support Brexit in the light of the probable "deals" the UK could negotiate with the EU and the likely consequences of Brexit?

And what should Labour say, in or out of the EU, about freedom of movement? It is of course a complex issue, all the more reason for a debate! And for Labour conference to discuss the full range of views on Brexit and Europe.

So why doesn't a champion of the newly invigorated and open Labour Party accept it would be a good idea for conference to have that debate?

Possibly Bastani doesn't know what he thinks, having flip-flopped on the issue of the EU. He went into the referendum believing in the "Lexit" miracle, then changed sides and backed "Remain". He had agreed to speak for "Lexit" in a debate with Workers' Liberty at NUT conference 2016 and withdrew at a few hours' notice.

Since the referendum Bastani has been a champion of the "will of the people", condemning the "remoaners" and "remainiacs" for questioning the unclear and indecisive plans of the Labour leadership.

A debate or democratic challenge to the perceived wisdom of the leadership is worrying for people who are unsure or are scared of the leadership losing a vote. They think it will be a sign of weakness and could there-

fore lose Labour an election.

The last time we heard this kind of argument Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair were Labour's leaders. The only difference between now and then is that even under Blair there were debates on contentious issues at conference (but the votes were ignored).

But can a Corbyn-led Labour Party really afford to ignore the majority of Labour members who oppose Brexit? At last year's Labour conference Brexit was not prioritised for debate, after Momentum and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy pushed for it to not to be discussed. We would like to stop something like that happening again.

Twelve months on, there is now widespread disquiet about Labour's policy on Brexit — from the left as well as the right. Labour is run by people who spent years fighting for democracy in the party, who should be able to see why debating this issue is important.

We are for a pluralist and open party, one that is genuinely committed to democratic debate and discussion. Bastani claims we are disloyal and hostile to Labour. This is ludicrous! Our political tendency has been fighting for a Labour government since our entire



Bastani shortly before the 2016 referendum admitted he was wrong but now resorts to smears against the anti-Brexit left.

existence. The forerunner of *Solidarity*, *Socialist Organiser*, initiated the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory in 1978. All of this was before Bastani was born!

In the first place our loyalty is to the democratic traditions of the labour movement, which is why we express our views openly and honestly.

Loyalty to the Labour leadership without the prospect of challenge on issues of policy is dishonest politics, but, that apparently, is the place where Bastani finds himself most comfortable.

We have invited Aaron Bastani to debate us on "Can Labour stop Brexit? Should it?" at Ideas for Freedom on 23-24 June, or at a time he can make. We await his response.

The financial fantasy of "Scotland's future"

SCOTLAND

By Dale Street

After two years in the making, the SNP's Sustainable Growth Commission Report "Scotland – The New Case for Optimism – A Strategy for Inter-Generational Economic Renaissance" was finally published last week.

The 354-page report is meant to remedy the deficiencies of the SNP White Paper "Scotland's Future", the basis of its pro-independence campaign in the 2014 referendum.

"Scotland's Future" was criticised at the time for its facile economic assumptions, reckless predictions, and glib optimism about the economy of an independent Scotland. The new document effectively concedes the validity of those criticisms.

In doing so it throws up a new set of problems for advocates of Scottish independence. It also makes a variety of new off-the-wall claims about the economy of an independent Scotland.

The report claims that independence would eventually produce a windfall of £4,100 for every Scot. This is based on the wishful-thinking hypothesis: "If we had the same GDP/capita as the Netherlands." But the report does not explain how Scotland might become a second Netherlands.

The report cites twelve high-growth, high-income small countries as "proof" of how prosperous an independent Scotland would be. This is a transparent sleight of hand. It is no more logical than citing twelve low-

growth, low-income small countries as "proof" of how poor an independent Scotland would be.

In any case, some of the twelve countries cited in the report have achieved their rates of economic growth through policies which the SNP claims to disavow, such as the low-tax and high-income-inequality policies pursued by Singapore and Hong Kong.

To complicate matters even further, the report proposes that an independent Scotland model its economic policies on those of Denmark, Finland and Norway — but their growth rates are no higher than those of large advanced economies (including the UK's).

The promised windfall does not even offset the loss of the fiscal transfer arising from the current UK-wide pooling and sharing mechanisms. That transfer would end on day one of independence. But when the supposed £4,100 windfall would kick in is anyone's guess.

The report claims that it would kick in after 25 years. But only by assuming that Scottish economic growth would be 0.7% higher than if Scotland were to remain in the UK. And the assumption is just that: an assumption.

In the meantime, full-blown austerity would be on the agenda for at least a decade, and probably a lot longer.

The budget deficit of an independent Scotland would be cut from 8% to 3% within a decade. The total debt ceiling would be no more than 50% of GDP. (UK debts currently amount to 86% of GDP.) And £5 billion a year would be paid to the UK-minus-Scotland as a "solidarity payment" in order to service Scotland's debt.

None of these could be achieved without major cuts in public spending.

In an attempt to answer the question of what the currency of an independent Scotland would be — in 2014 the SNP had promised a currency union although this had been ruled out by the UK government — the report proposes at least ten years of sterlingisation.

Scotland would simply continue to use the pound sterling, without asking anyone's "permission". But this means that an independent Scotland would have no say over interest rates and mortgage rates. Nor could it print its own money or devalue in an economic crisis.

In a worst-case scenario, this would reduce Scotland to being a cross between Panama (uses US dollar) and Greece (no control over currency in use).

INDEPENDENT

After a decade of sterlingisation (and hyper-austerity) an independent Scotland would (or could, or might, or might not) opt for an independent currency.

If this is not confusing enough in itself, even more confusion lies in wait in what the report has to say (or not say) about an independent Scotland and the EU.

At times the report implies that Scotland would seek membership of the EU, in order to achieve "frictionless borders" with EU countries. But elsewhere in the document EU membership is no more than a vague possibility: "If Scotland became an EU member in the future"

Would an independent Scotland use the

euro if it were an EU member-state? The report's answer is variously "No" ("Scotland would retain sterling") and "Yes" ("Scotland would join the euro only if and when such a decision was in the best interests of Scotland and the EU.").

As one of the report's analysts has put it: "So, Scotland might be in the EU or it might not, and it might join the euro or it might not." But this report is meant to clarify the questions left unanswered by "Scotland's Future"!

The only positive aspect to the report is that it has deepened divisions in the pro-independence camp.

The purists have been angered by the sterlingisation proposal (which hardly amounts to independence) and the report's admission that many of its proposals could be achieved without independence (so why bother with independence?).

The Kool-Aid drinkers who deluded themselves into thinking that an independent Scotland would be the harbinger of socialism in one country have been angered by the cuts in public spending needed to achieve the report's economic targets.

And the more rationally minded have dismissed the report as so much empty verbiage with nothing positive to contribute to clarification of the route to, and the nature of, an independent Scotland.

It would therefore be unfair to be overly critical of the report: It is a positive contribution to dividing, weakening and undermining the campaign for independence.



Labour and Brexit: members must decide

In response to the continuing fiascos and scandals about the shape of Brexit, the Labour Party is edging towards a “less-Brexit” stance. But it remains evasive.

Labour members and trade unionists must be able to debate this out at Labour conference on 23-26 September this year.

The labour movement needs a policy debated through the ranks, not just “managed” by self-accredited sages and scribblers in the Leader’s Office. Only then can it have ideas which it can take out to the unorganised and the wavering voters, to convince them.

The latest eye-opener came from Britain’s tax chief on 23 May, officially telling the government that “max-fac”, its favourite alternative to staying in the EU customs union, will cost £20 billion a year and anyway take years after the government’s Brexit date to implement. The EU’s view is that “max-fac” is unworkable anyway.

That’s just the latest. In September 2017 the

TUC went officially on record saying that staying in the single market and the customs union should be “an option” — and it suggested no other option that would deliver what the TUC wanted.

Denying that migrants are to blame for problems with public services, the TUC said flatly: “They aren’t: politicians who have imposed savage cuts are”.

Free movement? The TUC said: “There are many different ways countries in the EU have interpreted free movement. The approach taken in the UK has allowed bad employers to profit whilst letting public services decline... The UK should urgently adopt tough measures to prevent bad bosses exploiting migrant workers and undercutting local labour markets”.

That’s evasive. It leaves an open door for meaner limits for migrant workers’ access to benefits, although they pay more into the welfare system than they draw out. But it’s

more for free movement than against it.

In 2016 the Labour Party leaders and Momentum blocked debate at Labour conference on Brexit. Labour’s ranks must ensure there is debate this year.

Some say that when *Solidarity* campaigns for debate in the Labour Party on this, we are allying with the right.

Our angle is different from the anti-Brexit segments of the Labour right. They are concerned for continued smooth, cheap supply chains and export paths for British bosses, and some of them explicitly oppose free movement. Our main concern is rights to free movement.

In any case, socialists cannot decide our politics by always saying the reverse of what the right says. To do that would be, in fact, to let the right do our thinking for us. We must have our own independent view.

For decades socialists who supported workers’ rights in the Stalinist states had to

“ally with” (some of) the right, against the “mainstream” left, when the issue came up for debate in the labour movement.

Some say that debate should be avoided because it might embarrass or discredit the Labour leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell.

But Corbyn continued to defend free movement for some time after the June 2016 referendum. He capitulated in November 2016, partly because Labour left groups like Momentum gave him no support on the issue against the Labour right who said that Labour must concede to anti-migrant feeling among some Labour supporters.

Corbyn can and should return to his principles. If we abstain on the issue for fear of embarrassing him, that means that we too are capitulating to the anti-migrant right, only at one remove.

Some on the left say, as most of the Labour right said in 2016, that anti-migrant feeling among Labour voters is so strong and immovable that we dare not demand a popular vote before any Brexit deal, or campaign to cancel Brexit via that vote.

Most Labour voters are anti-Brexit. A minority are pro-Brexit. Most of those are not hardened anti-migrant bigots. They can be convinced. But only by an argument; not by evasions.

Those hardened in anti-migrant prejudices may not be convinced by a socialist argument; but they will not be convinced by evasions, either.

There are principles here. Free movement is a principle. Reducing barriers between countries — except where issues of self-determination for otherwise-oppressed nations claim primacy, which they can’t here — is a principle.



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In Solidarity 469 we published an interview with Henry Fowler, a Labour council candidate in Wandsworth in the May elections. We mistakenly said the interview was with Brent councillor Jumbo Chan. Apologies. The interview can be found here: bit.ly/2L5BxVY

France 1968: when the workers

By Martin Thomas

On Friday 3 May students from Nanterre university, on the edge of Paris, where large protests over miscellaneous issues had been building up since March 1967 went to the Sorbonne, in the centre of Paris, for a meeting. The university authorities panicked and called in the CRS riot police.

The police raid on the Sorbonne galvanised many more students than just the left-wing activists. On the night of 3-4 May the student union UNEF and the junior lecturers' union SNESup (led by a Maoist) called their members out on strike.

The following week, 6-11 May, thousands of students took to the streets of Paris. On Monday 6th 25 to 30,000 students marched and fought the police. On Tuesday 7th, 50,000 demonstrated.

The next day, Friday 10th, 20 to 30,000 students assembled for yet another demonstration. Observing riot police all round them, the demonstrators built barricades. At 2am the police attacked the barricades, and battles continued until 6am.

The Communist Party, a Stalinist party slowly mutating into social democracy, was then by far the strongest party among France's more militant workers. It had been hostile to the students. After 10-11 May it realised that it had to change its tone. The CP-led union federation, the CGT, joined with other trade unions in calling a one-day general strike for 13 May.

The government withdrew the police from the Sorbonne; students swarmed back in and, for the next month, turned it into a non-stop festival of revolutionary and utopian debates.

On Monday 13th, one million workers and students filled the streets of Paris. There were big demonstrations in other cities, too.

The trend since the 1940s had been for union membership to decline. The CGT and the CFDT had called a national protest strike over social security and unemployment only six months earlier, on 13 December 1967, and only a scattering of workers had responded.

The 13 May one-day strike was different. The next day, Tuesday 14th, the workers of Sud Aviation in Nantes occupied their factory. Several other workplaces occupied on the 15th; the most important was the Renault car factory at Cleon. It had only had a turnout of 40% or so for the strike on the 13th.

On Thursday 16th the biggest Renault factory, at Billancourt near Paris, was occupied.

Although the French revolutionary left was small then (the biggest group, the Trotsky-Guevarist JCR, had 300 members) and based mostly among students, the few Trotskyist activists in big industrial workplaces had a hugely-out-of-proportion role in starting action at places like Sud Aviation and Billancourt.

By the end of the week some two million workers were on strike. A general strike was under way. The trade unions supported the strike movement, though they never called an indefinite general strike.

Individual students and individual workers — especially young workers — joined ef-



forts in neighbourhood Action Committees. The CP tried to keep links between students and workers to a minimum, and the workplace occupations in the hands of the minority of union stalwarts.

But by 18 May the Communist Party felt it had to declare: "It is time to get rid of the government and to promote an authentic democracy capable of opening a path to socialism..."

The Nanterre student activists, in a leaflet of 21 May, addressed themselves to workers: "You are asking for a minimum wage of 1,000 francs in the Paris area, retirement at sixty, a 40 hour week for 48 hours' pay. These are long-standing and just demands: nevertheless they seem to be out of context with our aims.

"Yet you have gone on to occupy factories, take your managers hostage, strike without warning... The form that your struggle has taken offers us students the model for true socialist activity: the appropriation of the means of production and of decision-making power by the workers".

REFERENDUM

On 24 May De Gaulle announced a referendum on his reform plans.

The strike still grew. On Friday 17 May there were about two million workers on strike; on Monday 20th, about six million; by Friday 24th, and until the end of May, about ten million were reported on strike.

Careful calculations indicate that the peak number on strike was six to eight million rather than ten million. But it was by far the biggest general strike in history to that date. France's general strike in 1936, and Britain's in 1926, mobilised far fewer workers — about two million in each case.

A Central Strike Committee took control of the city of Nantes for a week, from 26 to 31 May, monitoring traffic, food supplies, and petrol distribution. On the night of 24-25 May, another big demonstration in Paris led to the fiercest street fighting yet, and the Stock Exchange was set on fire.

On Monday 27 May the union leaders emerged from talks with the government and the employers with the Grenelle Agreement — a 30% increase in the national minimum

wage, a 10% rise in all private sector wages, a cut in the working week of one or two hours, and concessions on social security, union rights in workplaces, etc.

CGT leader Georges Séguy hurried to the CP's greatest industrial fortress, Renault Billancourt, to sell this deal. Sensing the mood of the workers, he avoided a direct call for a return to work, but still the workers booed and whistled.

The same morning, many other factories rejected the Grenelle deal. The strike continued.

By spreading the sort of local workers' power that had been created in Nantes, linking together the local workers' committees into a national congress of workers' councils to underpin a workers' government, and organising workers' militias to fight off the counter-revolutionaries, the movement could indeed have gone further. It could have overthrown capitalism. But those who had some idea of what to do, because they had studied such matters — the Trotskyists — did not have the strength and the roots in the working class to organise it; and the group which did have the strength, the Communist Party, did not want to organise a revolution.

On Thursday 30th, De Gaulle called off the referendum and announced that there would be general elections of the National Assembly in June. Over half a million people joined a pro-Gaullist demonstration in Paris, chanting "Back to work!", "Clean out the Sorbonne!", "We are the majority!" Some cried "Cohn-Bendit to Dachau!" [Daniel Cohn-Bendit, one of the Nanterre student leaders, was Jewish].

The combined weight of the government and of the main traditional leaders of the working class now began to press towards a return to work and reliance on the election. The revolutionaries were not strong enough to show workers a sufficiently convincing alternative path.

On Friday 31st armed police seized the post office in Rouen, driving out the workers who had occupied it.

From 3 to 7 June workplaces abandoned the strike one by one, usually after winning some slight improvement over the Grenelle terms. On Friday 7 June the police went in to try to break the occupation at Renault Flins.

After several days of fighting, on 17 June the workers voted 4811 to 3456 for a return to work. On Tuesday 11th police broke the occupation at Peugeot Sochaux, killing two workers. As at Flins, the workers managed to reoccupy, but returned to work soon after.

On Wednesday 12th all the revolutionary left groups were banned. On Sunday 16th the Sorbonne fell to the police, and on Tuesday 18th Renault Billancourt returned to work. Only a few workplaces stayed on strike into July.

In the Assembly elections of 23-30 June the Gaullists increased their majority, the CP and the Socialist Party lost votes, and the PSU, the only party with an electoral base that had backed the movement, increased its vote only from 2% to 4%. The election seemed to prove that all the talk of revolution in May had been fantasy. Not so.

In May millions of workers had started thinking for the first time that society could be organised differently. They had gained a new confidence; they had dared to think that perhaps the working class could run society, without the capitalists ruling over it.

Except among a small minority, these thoughts were vague, unclear, tentative. Then the traditional leaders of the working class did all they could to make the strike movement fade and peter out, with only minor bread-and-butter gains; and they went into an election where the CP strove no less than the Gaullists to present itself as the Party of Order. No wonder many workers who had joined the general strike became disillusioned and voted for the real Party of Order.

OCCUPIED

In one area where the May strikes have been studied minutely (Nord Pas de Calais, in the north of France), 47% of workplaces were occupied. This included 88% of nationalised enterprises and 70% of factories in the metal industries.

Sometimes the occupations were run by a minority of union activists. But half the metalworking factories in Nord Pas de Calais were occupied by over 25% of the workforce.

The survey in Nord Pas de Calais found that in only 59% of workplaces did the workers want immediate negotiations on their demands. Another survey — of 100 workplaces across France — found that only two-thirds presented a list of demands after beginning their action. The workers knew they wanted something more than a little improvement in wages and conditions, but they did not know how to put the aspiration to change society into the form of a list of demands.

Workers read leaflets from groups like the JCR and Voix Ouvrière, and were interested particularly in their calls for workers' control. In no decisive sector did the workers really throw off the leadership of the CP. The CP rode the movement with some skill. At first (and later, in its apologetics after the event) the CP said that the strikes were, and should be, only about wages and conditions. But in the midst of the general strike the CP was willing to make its main demand "a people's government".

The CP preferred to have the factory occu-

s rose

pations run by a trusty minority of union activists. But they did not insist. They never set themselves brutally against the movement. They relied on the fact that a general strike cannot mark time. At a certain point, if it does not go forward, it must retreat.

In May 1968 the CP explained the issues as a matter of the sober, sensible revolutionaries (the CP) against the wild-eyed “pseudo-revolutionaries”.

After May 1968 the revolutionary left grew at least tenfold in numbers and even more in profile. Numerically, though not relatively, the CP gained more. Between 1966-7 and

1978 the CP doubled its membership, from 350,000 to 700,000; it also doubled the numbers of its youth organisation. The Socialist Party also gained, growing from maybe 60,000 members in 1968 to 200,000 in 1978.

May 1968 confirmed what had already been indicated by the events of 1918-19 in Germany and 1936 in France: in countries with a well-established labour movement, in times of revolutionary upheaval, a great number of workers turn first to the established parties, even if those parties are utterly reformist.

DILEMMA

The dilemma in such revolutionary situations for the Marxist groups is that they have to combine two tasks pulling them in different directions.

They have to express and channel the urgent fury of the more combative workers and youth, and at the same time to keep in communication with the greater number of more

cautious workers who still give the established parties credence.

No amount of energy, dedication and political astuteness could have permitted France’s revolutionary Marxists to build themselves a mass party in the decades before 1968.

But nothing in the overall politics of that period made building an organisation of a few thousand impossible. There must have been many times in the 50s and early 60s when the daily grind of building a revolutionary organisation — the paper sales, the meetings, the attempts to activate the inactive, the endless theoretical debates and arguments — seemed unproductive and futile. In May 1968 every effort expended over the previous decades was repaid a hundredfold; every lapse or mistake cost dear.

French capitalism seems to have absorbed the impact of May 1968 with great ease. Economically, the immediate result of the wage rises won in 1968 was a consumer boom

which in turn fuelled an industrial boom. Industrial production rose at 6.6% per year from 1967 to 1973, an improvement on the already brisk rate of 5% a year recorded between 1958 and 1967. The share of profits in non-agricultural value-added even rose, despite the big wage rises.

The French capitalists, however, should not take too much comfort from their system’s proof of its capacity to adapt. One of the lessons of 1968 is that capitalism can generate revolutionary crises even when it is relatively prosperous and flexible.

In hindsight it is possible to list factors which made France explosive in 1968. But at the time, no-one at the time thought that France was about to explode.

Afterwards Daniel Cohn-Bendit said: “having lived through it, I can’t ever say: ‘It will never happen’.”

• **Abridged from an article in *Workers’ Liberty* 10, May 1998: bit.ly/wl10-1968**



Provisional agenda*

Thursday 21 June

This year our Thursday evening walking tour will return with a Suffragette theme for the 100th anniversary of the vote being won for some women. Watch this space for more details.

Friday 22 June

Capitalism versus Socialism — Workers’ Liberty debates Dr. Kristian Niemetz of the Institute of Economic Affairs

Saturday 23 June

11:45-12:25 – Opening rally

12:30-14:00

Solidarnosc 1981: revolution against Stalinism
Neurodiversity under capitalism and under socialism with Janine Booth, author of *Autism Equality in the Workplace*, and Dr. Dinah Murray
The left in government: a panel discussing the experiences of Syriza in Greece, Lula’s Workers’ Party in Brazil, Mitterrand’s government in France, and the Wilson/Callaghan governments in Britain.
Who’ll clean the toilets under socialism?

14:00-15:00 – Lunch

15:05-16:25

How do revolutionary socialists organise?
Challenges of a Labour government: “The Corbyn road to socialism? Next steps for Labour”
Featuring Simon Hannah, author of *A Party With Socialists In It* and co-editor of the *Clarion* magazine, David Osland, Labour left activists and journalist, Ruth Cashman (Lambeth Union co-chair), and more tbc.
Revolt in the degree factories: building on the UCU strike with UCU activists Rhian Keyse and Jo Grady, and National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts activist Monty Shield
Iran: the anti-imperialist myth with film-maker Kaveh Abbassian and Obi Saiq

16:25-16:45 – Break

16:50-18:05

The new New Unionism? a discussion on reviving the trade union movement hosted by the Labour Days podcast, featuring a striker from the East Dulwich Picturehouse cinema strike, and more
Can Labour stop Brexit? with Michael Chessum, Another Europe Is Possible, and activists from the Labour Campaign for Free Movement
Is Venezuela a model?
Why we published *Socialism Makes Sense*

18:40-19:50

What will education look like under socialism? with University and College union activist and education researcher Sol Gamsu, and teacher activists from the National Education Union
Capitalism is killing us! a discussion on capitalism and health with healthworker activists from the BMA and Unison
What should Labour do on crime and policing?
The 2011 uprising in Libya and its aftermath with Clive Bradley, co-writer of a forthcoming TV series on Muammar Qaddafi

Sunday 24 June

10:30-12:00

Socialism and democracy
A crisis of care: socialist feminism and the welfare state under the next Labour government with the Workers’ Liberty’s Lambeth’s socialist-feminist reading group
Contemporary Trotskyism with Professor John Kelly
Left antisemitism: what it is and how to fight it with Daniel Randall, Matt Bolton, and Hannah Weisfeld

12:00-13:00 – Lunch

13:05-14:25

The Sheffield Workers’ Committee with Edd Mustill, co-editor of the *Clarion* magazine
Nationalise the banks! with Positive Money and Workers’ Liberty activists
The class struggle in China with Demaine Boocock
The invention of guns: socialists, militarism, and gun control with Dr. Catherine Fletcher

14:25-14:35 – Break

14:35-16:00

Reimagining local government with speakers from the Labour left revolt against the “Haringey Development Vehicle”, Architects for Social Housing, and Namaa AL Mahdi,
Hounslow Momentum
Animation behind the Iron Curtain
The case for Bolshevik organising
The global fight for women’s rights with the South Asia Solidarity Group and more to be confirmed

16:05-16:30 – Closing rally

*Agenda subject to change. For updates to sessions or timings see www.workersliberty.org/ideas

Book your tickets today!

Weekend tickets cover the whole event, Thursday-Sunday. Single day tickets are available, as well as separate tickets for Thursday’s walking tour and Friday’s debate.
• Until 10 June tickets are £37 waged, £19 low-waged/university student, and £7 unwaged/school student.
• Tickets booked before the event are £43/£21/£7.
• Tickets on the door cost more.
• Free creche and accommodation available.
Book online at www.workersliberty.org/ideas or ring 020 7394 8923 to book over the phone

The 1980s and left antisemitism

By John O'Mahony

Consider Ken Livingstone and the Labour Party, Al Capone and the US government. They jailed Alphonse Capone, a multiple-murderer gangster, for tax evasion. That was odd, but I think it better they got him for that than that they didn't get him at all.

So with Ken Livingstone's separation from the Labour Party on antisemitism. Livingstone has for nearly four decades been a public purveyor of political antisemitism.

Here I want to consider how serious antisemitism has spread into the Labour Party by way of the ostensibly revolutionary left — the WRP and the SWP — and their ex-members migrating into Labour. In 1981-5 Ken Livingstone ran (through *Labour Herald*) a branch of the WRP's antisemitic operation, for which the WRP was well rewarded, with over £1 million, by Arab dictatorships.

I can think of three main currents of virulent antisemitism that flow into the septic strains of Labour left antisemitism, and one, so to speak, prehistoric source.

Two of the leaders of the first British Marxist organisation, the Social Democratic Federation founded in 1881-3, were, to judge by the vehemence of what they wrote, antisemites: Henry Hyndman and Harry Quelch.

The SDF was not a kitsch-Leninist sect. Discussion was possible. Ernest Belfort Bax and others argued opposite views.

The Stalinist current is unfortunately not ancient history. There was from the beginning a dimension of antisemitism in the Stalin group. In the 1920s Trotsky wrote about the use of antisemitism in the branches of the Bolshevik Party against the Opposition. In the Moscow show trials of the mid-30s, the original Jewish names of the victims, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and many others, were printed in the newspapers along with the names for which they had been known for decades. When Trotsky pointed that out, even right-wing Jewish leaders in the USA denounced him for libelling Stalin.

Between 1949 and Stalin's death in 1953 a series of show trials were held in the satellite states of Eastern Europe in which many of the victims, leading Stalinists such as Rudolf Slansky in Czechoslovakia and Lazlo Rajk in Hungary, were accused as "Zionists" as well as enemy agents. The Stalinist press throughout the world echoed Moscow and Prague.

What now poisons the minds of many people on the left originated in that Stalinist campaign. It was rehashed in the writings of Lenni Brenner.

"Zionist" was used but Jew was meant. The Zionists had collaborated with the Nazis. The inner natures of Nazism and Zionism were symmetrically racist. The Zionists-Jews were "rootless cosmopolitans", part of a great international network of reactionary conspirators. Israel — which Stalin had at first backed, as a potential lever against the British Empire — was a spawn of imperialism and racism. It was an illegitimate state.

In 1952 five Jewish doctors who had served the dwellers in the Kremlin were accused of poisoning and planning the poison the leaders. Stalin died before they could be brought to trial, and they were released. If Stalin had lived, a large-scale rounding-up of the USSR's Jews would probably have been the outcome of the "anti-Zionist" antisemitic drum-beating.

The two more recent springs of antisemitism in the left come, one from the WRP and Ken Livingstone, and one from the SWP.

The WRP had once been an Orthodox Trot-



skyist organisation, flawed but real. For good reasons and partly with good politics, it interested itself in revolutionary movements in the Arab countries. It actively supported the Algerian war of independence against France (1954-62) and had links with one of the nationalist organisations there: it published a small pamphlet with a portrait of that organisation's leader, Messali Hadj, on the cover. Two of its French co-thinkers, one of them Pierre Lambert, stood trial in France in the mid 1950s for supporting the Algerians. (They were acquitted).

When the current poisonous wisdom of the Trotskyist left on Israel was being created by Stalin and his allies, 1949-53, the group called the concoction what it was, antisemitism, and denounced it.

WRP

In 1976-7 the leaders of the steeply declining WRP sold its services to Muammar Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, and the PLO as a propaganda outlet for them and a spy agency on prominent Jews ("Zionists") and on Arabs in Britain.

They published big pamphlets glowing with adulation about Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein that could have been published by the regimes, and certainly were financed by them.

Part of the deal was that the WRP now made anti-Jewish propaganda. They salved their political consciences by saying Zionist when they meant Jew, but there was no mistaking the meaning. They saw "Zionist" conspiracies everywhere, for instance when a Jewish man, Stuart Young, was made chair of governors of the BBC. They roused a huge and cry in the labour movement against... Zionists.

They published at least one editorial about a "Zionist connection" running from Ronald Reagan's White House, through Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, all the way to *Socialist Organiser* (9 April 1983: bit.ly/nl-830409).

In the early 1980s the WRP helped Ken Livingstone and other by starting a weekly paper, *Labour Herald*. The *Herald* echoed the WRP's hysterical "anti-Zionism" in articles and cartoons: one, in June 1982, show Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin in SS uniform and giving a Nazi salute). When in 1985

Livingstone went for and won the Labour parliamentary selection for Brent East, the WRP ran a vicious campaign against the sitting Labour MP, Reg Freeson, as "the Zionist Freeson", i.e. the Jew Freeson.

Even after the WRP collapsed, among much scandal, in 1985, Livingstone never dissociated himself from it. As late as 1994, he wrote a friendly introduction to a hagiographical biography of the WRP's long-time leader Gerry Healy (bit.ly/kl-gh).

SWP

The SWP too had a hardened animosity to Israel. The central figure in the group, Ygael Gluckstein (Tony Cliff), was a Palestinian-born Jew in background. He could say things that someone who was not Jewish could not say.

His wife Chanie, who was active in the group, and her brother Michael Kidron, who was for a long time also a central figure in the group, were also of Palestinian Jewish background.

Cliff's political evolution and history on this question can be traced in the files of the Trotskyist press. On the eve of war in 1939 he was involved in exchanges about Palestine in the American magazine *New International*. At that point he was in favour of free Jewish immigration into Palestine.

In December 1944 the British Revolutionary Communist Party published an Open Letter from Palestinian Trotskyists (unsigned, but written by Cliff) to the Labour Party conference, urging delegates not to back the motion from the Executive.

Somehow, living in Palestine, in the shadow of the Holocaust and in the course of it, he had become a hardened opponent of free Jewish immigration. It is tempting to explain this as neurotic guilt focused against the other Jews who had got to Palestine and like himself survived? One can speculate. But the hard political fact is that sometime in the period between the outbreak of war and 1944, he turned into a lifelong enemy of the Palestine Jews.

He left Palestine in September 1946, and at a time when many Jews were in displaced persons' camps he had the resources, and contacts such as ILP MP John McGovern, to arrange a visa to go to Ireland as a student

and to spend enough time in Britain to become part of the British Trotskyist movement.

His critics within the organisation during and after the Six Day War in 1967 would explain his bitterly Israeli-defeatist politics then in terms of his having been given "a hard time": he had spent a month in jail in late 1939 in the company of hard-core Zionist prisoners. He had been won over or coerced to their views, for a short time. I have no independent knowledge of that. Cliff's was, however, a remarkable shift of opinion to make in the early 1940s and in Palestine, and it does need explaining.

In an interview in *Socialist Review* 100 (July-August 1987), Cliff would say that he was wrong to favour free Jewish immigration to Palestine before the war. Considering the alternative — death — which those who escaped from Europe had avoided, that was a judgement that it would have been better if they had not escaped.

None of the Trotskyist organisations backed the Arab states in the 1948 war. Nor did Cliff. He was silent on the question for many years thereafter, and according to his biographer Ian Birchall said of Israel, with a shrug: "What's done is done".

In the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967 Cliff published a pamphlet on Israel. That was not the full absolute anti-Zionist position: noting that "an anti-Israeli campaign quite easily degenerates into a 'jihad'," he took that as a bad thing, and implied, if unclearly, the same rights of national self-determination for the Israeli Jews as for the Kurds: "a socialist republic, with full rights for Jews, Kurds and all national minorities".

The group then prided itself on a theory that capitalist imperialism had come to an end. The SWP would not attain its present "anti-imperialist" pitch until 1987, when it switched to support Iran in the Iran-Iraq war.

An anti-Israel tone became dominant after the 1973 war, but the shift to hostility to Israel becoming a world outlook, with all its ramifications was also around 1986-7.

It can be dated to July 1986, when they published a pamphlet, much reprinted since, entitled *Israel, the Hijack State*, whose cover cartoon showed Israel as a mad dog on a leash held by the USA.

Diversifying sexuality

Elizabeth Butterworth reviews *Queer Sex* by Juno Roche

This book that is simultaneously poignant, thought-provoking, ground-breaking and refreshingly honest.

Subtitled as ‘A Trans and Non-Binary Guide to Intimacy, Pleasure and Relationships,’ *Queer Sex* is really a first foray into the possibilities of trans sexuality, intimacy and desire. This foray dovetails with Roche’s own experiences as a trans woman seeking intimacy and fulfilling sexual relationships.

As Roche illustrates very clearly, for some trans people, the genitals and sexual organs they were born with may be seen by themselves or by society as a “problem” to be mitigated with hormone therapy and/or surgery.

They may have fantasised about having a different set of genitals or sexual organs, along with a different body or gender presentation generally.

Once these things have been changed, some people may have assumed that their sexuality and their intimate relationships would change. But, as Roche finds, it can be a lot more complex, challenging and exciting.

Roche starts the book by contemplating her relationship with her vagina. It’s bold and audacious writing that enabled me to gain a real sense of her feelings over time. I empathised with her frustration and sadness but also with her curiosity and hopefulness.

I’m a cisgender lesbian, but like most other human adults, I too have sometimes felt in-

adequate or unfulfilled in the bedroom or in relationships, and so rather than pathologising trans people I was able to strongly relate.

Most of the book is made up of framed interviews where Roche is the interviewer. Roche introduces us to the subjects and reflects upon the conversations afterwards.

As a high-profile, respected trans activist, Roche provides the reader with a sympathetic and warm insight into the intimate lives of the interviewees.

She talks to non-binary people with various trans experiences as well as binary trans people who are pre-transition, mid-transition, post-transition or who have chosen certain aspects of transition but not others.

The only unifying feature in these interviews was their immense diversity.

Some people were comfortable with all aspects of sexuality and their being trans had a limited or non-existent effect on their capacity to be sexually or romantically intimate.

EXPERIENCES

Others’ sexual experiences had been massively shaped by being trans.

For many of the interviewees, transition had had unexpected effects on them and was far from plain sailing.

There was diversity even sometimes within one account. Human sexuality is a complex thing and all our experiences as well as our genetics and our physical bodies and minds can affect it.

Two interviews have stuck with me and I have found myself mulling on them as I commute to work.

The first regarded a common experience for trans women who have had surgery to create a vagina. In order to prevent their vaginas from closing up, they are instructed to use a dilator to stretch the muscles.

This is a very boring, medicalised and potentially painful scenario for a lot of trans women. But, one of the interviewees asked Roche, why not use a vibrator or dildo instead? They’re softer, made from materials that are more comfortable on one’s genitals, and provide pleasure as well as relaxing the vaginal walls.

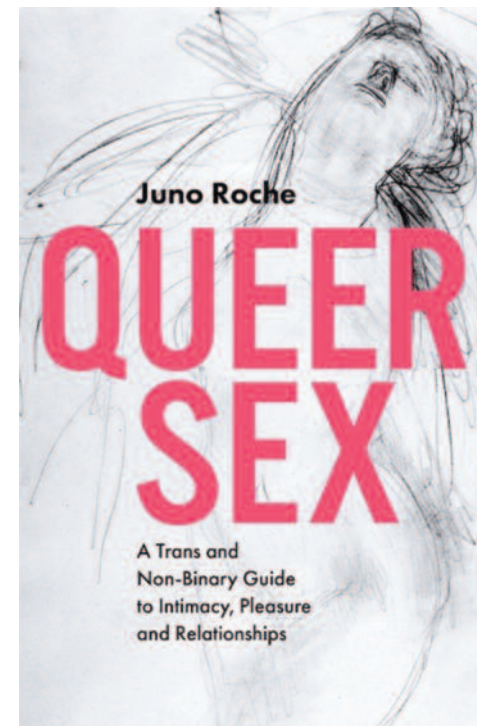
This very simple solution is eye-opening. Should being penetrated be the goal — can’t some trans women enjoy sex without it? (Of course they can.) And why hadn’t anyone mentioned this solution to Juno before? Trans people are no different from cis people in enjoying sex toys.

The other account that stuck with me was an interview with some people who are in a non-binary self-pleasure group. They meet up with a few others, relax together, eat together, and once they are comfortable people masturbate or otherwise pleasure themselves in the same room.

Apparently similar arrangements had come about during the AIDS crisis to prevent the transmission of HIV.

It makes absolute sense as masturbation is the safest kind of sex, physically and emotionally. It can improve someone’s wellbeing and help people to enjoy their bodies.

I started wondering if we shouldn’t have a public health campaign promoting masturbation!



Queer Sex is a fabulous — but still realistic — celebration of trans and non-binary people, their bodies and their sexuality. Thanks to Roche’s clever writing and insider perspective, it isn’t in the least exploitative, dehumanising or voyeuristic.

I hope it leads to many conversations between activists, politicians and health professionals. Pretty much anyone would benefit from reading it.

The Third Irish Revolution

By Sean Matgamna

Have you heard the ultimate “Irish” joke? In a referendum on a united Ireland the Protestant Unionists of north-east Ulster campaign for “no” on the grounds that the South is too liberal. The people no longer fear God, maybe scarcely believe in it, and refuse to listen to their spiritual advisers.

The two-to-one vote on 25 May to rip up the 8th amendment to the Irish constitution — entrenched there by a referendum in 1983 — was a great empowering and liberating event for the women of Ireland, Mná na hÉireann. Legislation to allow abortion will soon follow.

The yes vote in the referendum on women’s right to choose is a great event in Irish history — the Third Irish Revolution.

In the last 150 years Ireland experienced two revolutions. The first broke the power of the landlords and gave the land to — some of — the people, creating mass peasant ownership.

The second Irish Revolution was the political revolution in which the 26 Counties ended British occupation and rule, winning virtual independence and the freedom to make it real independence, as was done in the second half of the 1930s. The Six Counties was given a limited Home Rule.

The Third Irish Revolution is the breaking of the power of the bishops, priests, and nuns. You might call it the end of the Roman occupation.

Of course, the Revolution did not happen last Friday. It has been going on for a quarter of a century or more. Friday’s vote registered that it had happened.

In the campaign before the referendum on a cardinal Catholic doctrine, the bishops and priests and nuns skulked, knowing that people wouldn’t listen to them and would resent their advice — still less accept the diktat of a gang of proven child rapists and people who covered for the rapists and let them go on doing what they did to small children.

People are too aware of mass unmarked graves for infants and small children who died in nun-run institutions to listen patiently to nuns pleading for the sacredness of the potential life of an unborn embryo.

But yesterday the bishops bestrode Ireland like colossi. Now they skulk, and only one in three is so poor that they will listen reverently to their spiritual advice.

For decades, it was impossible for honest Irish nationalists to deny that the old Unionist cry that Home Rule would become Rome Rule had come true. It could be argued that if there had been an autonomous united Ireland in which Protestants were a sizeable minority, then things might have gone differently; but could be no more than hypothesis and hope and might-have-been.

The reality was an independent Ireland that saw itself as the rebirth of the not entirely mythical Island of Saints and Scholars of long ago, but in reality was a place of priest and nun sexual and sadistic child-exploitation, where the stulted bourgeoisie lived by ex-



Catholic “laundries” were run across Ireland for “fallen” women and their children

porting cattle and the young people, for decades educated up to semi-literacy if that.

There were cases of people escaping to the North, for what was political asylum, from the Magdalene Houses run by nuns, where sexual nonconformists were illegally held and forced to work without pay. Now perhaps women from the North who want an abortion will be going South, where what is still illegal in the North will now be legal.

Sinn Féin was for yes in the referendum, and in the Six Counties will now be to the liberal left of the Unionists on this vastly impor-

tant question.

Of course the Catholic Church in the South, though greatly weakened, is still entrenched, still dominant in education for example, very rich, and able to procrastinate for many years over payments to its victims. It has great reserves. The stake has not been driven into its shrivelled heart yet. The Third Irish Revolution still needs to be pushed through fully and comprehensively.

Bliss in this dawn to be alive? Indeed. And to be old is to remember how dark and how long the night was.

Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
 - A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
 - A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
 - Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
 - A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression.
- Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
 - Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
 - Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
 - Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
 - Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.



If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

Events

Saturday 2 June

London Momentum meet-up
3pm, Nunn Hall, UCL, Institute of Education, London, 20 Bedford Way, WC1H 0AL
bit.ly/2kdYYkr

Saturday 2 June

London Radical Bookfair
12pm, Goldsmiths University of London, Lewisham Way, London, SE14 6NW
bit.ly/2IAYSSC

Saturday 6 June

UoL back in house Strike and Protest (IWGB)
5.30pm, Senate House, University of London, London, WC1E 7HU
bit.ly/2shf5C9

8-10 June

We Are The University — National Student Left Conference
Sheffield Students' Union, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TG
bit.ly/8-10june

Saturday 9 June

Kurdish Solidarity Campaign AGM
11:30am, Kurdish Community Centre, 11 Portland Gardens, London, N4 1 HU
bit.ly/2GFceHQ

Have an event you want listing? Email:
solidarity@workersliberty.org

More online at www.workersliberty.org Workers' Liberty @workersliberty

RMT divided on Labour link

LABOUR

By an RMT activist

On 30 May, the RMT rail and transport union will hold its Special General Meeting in Doncaster to debate whether it should reaffiliate to Labour, the party the union helped found but from which it was expelled in 2004.

A period of consultation within the union has revealed a fairly even split. A slight majority of branches and Regional Councils that held meetings to debate the issue voted in favour of reaffiliation, but those voting against represent a slightly larger proportion of the membership.

The support of all three national officers for reaffiliation (General Secretary Mick Cash and the two Assistant General Secretaries, Mick Lynch and Steve Hedley) has led some in the anti-reaffiliation camp to characterise the drive as a top-down one that the bureaucracy is attempting to impose against the wishes of the members.

However, the reality was that some branch and Regional Council meetings that took positions on the question, on both sides, were attended by less than 0.5% of their memberships. In such circumstances, neither side can claim a rank-and-file groundswell for their position, nor that their strategy represents the overwhelming will of the members. Whatever the out-

come on 30 May, socialists and rank-and-file activists in the union will have much work to do to improve grassroots engagement.

The anti-reaffiliation case was presented as a campaign to defend the union's existing political strategy. In truth this is no coherent strategy at all, but a pick-and-mix approach that has seen the union donate some money to various Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates (never really a viable project and now nothing more than an electoral front for the Socialist Party), the odd Green, and a few independents, but has not contributed in any way to the building of permanent structures that might provide any serious or ongoing working-class political representation.

On the pro-affiliation side, some, including prominent Stalinists, have mobilised primarily bureaucratic arguments, emphasising the "influence" RMT might be able to have within Labour, mainly via possible seats on various committees. This is hardly an enthralling, rank-and-file case for reaffiliation.

Against both the incoherence of the anti-reaffiliation camp and the machine-politics influence-peddling of some on the pro side, others of us have presented a case for affiliation based on the possibility of RMT mobilising its grassroots



membership to intervene in transformative struggle at grassroots level in Labour.

If the union votes to reaffiliate, we will continue to make that case, and to argue for a genuinely democratic Labour link, responsive to control and pressure from below, rather than the ossified bureaucratic structure that Labour affiliation sometimes is in other unions. If the vote is against affiliation, we will continue to argue for a coherent political strategy, and for RMT members who do recognise the importance of involvement in Labour to coordinate to promote socialist policies and strike support within the party.

And whichever the vote goes, socialists on both sides of the debate must work together to renew rank-and-file engagement and reinvigorate the union's democratic culture.

This article first appeared on theclarionmag.org

We want unity in Lewisham

By Sacha Ismail

Activists in Lewisham for Corbyn (the established Momentum group in Lewisham) are campaigning for a new, properly conducted, democratic AGM, and for the election of a broad, politically pluralist committee representative of Momentum activists in Lewisham.

This comes, after National Momentum decided to recognise a farcically inaccessible, irregular and undemocratic ad hoc split meeting in the front bar of a pub as an official Lewisham Momentum AGM. Lewisham for Corbyn have submitted complaints about this and the campaign of lies and slander conducted by Stalinist Red London supporters, absolute anti-Zionists and others against the group in the run up to the AGM.

In the meantime, we have tried to explain these issues to Momentum supporters and the wider left in Lewisham and beyond, held two meetings since the abortive AGM and are getting on with campaigning, in particular around support-

ing the Lewisham Southwark College strike and other issues of workers' rights. However, rather than ignoring the other side in the split, we have approached them formally with proposals for unity.

Unity for us means sitting down, talking and trying to work out how the two groups can be reunified. The existence of two Momentum groups in Lewisham is a gift to the right and can only weaken the left, not just in terms of duplication of effort but the bad blood and frustration that have been generated.

It also means unity in terms of campaigning. There is no argument whatsoever against the two groups working together in struggle, whether that's the college strike, the by-election in Lewisham East or building up the left caucuses in Lewisham's local parties.

We know that the hard-core Stalinists, who drove the slander-and-split campaign to pursue a vendetta against the AWL and other left-wing critics of the Momentum office and leadership, will resist unity or even talking.



But we believe that there are good activists around the other group who will see the sense in trying to heal the breach in the Lewisham left.

• For Lewisham for Corbyn's open letter to the Amersham Arms Momentum group, see davelevy.info/lewisham-momentum

Striking against NHS outsourcing

By Gemma Short

Workers in Wroughtington, Wigan and Leigh NHS foundation trusts struck for 48 hours on Wednesday 23 and Thursday 24 May over outsourcing plans.

Hospital caterers, cleaners, porters, and other workers, members of Unison, voted by 89% in favour of strikes. Wroughtington, Wigan and Leigh NHS foundation trusts plan to outsource workers to a new company called WWL Solutions. The trusts claim they need to do the outsourcing to save money, however a recent staff newsletter quoted trust chief executive Andrew Foster saying it has not only met is financial plan, but recorded a “bottom line” surplus of £8.6m.

The workers’ main concern is that being outsourced makes their jobs less secure, and open to changes in pay and terms and conditions in the future. Given that the



stated reason for the plan is to enable the trust to save money, it is hard to imagine the new company would not try to reduce workers’ pay and conditions in order to save that money.

Workers picketed main hospital buildings during the strike and a rally was held in Wigan town centre with local Labour MP Lisa Nandy speaking.

Stopped from taking annual leave

By Luke Hardy

Refuse workers in the Kirklees area of west Yorkshire, members of Unison, returned a majority on 8 May for strikes over bullying and harassment, inability to take leave to attend medical appointments, and inability to take annual leave they are entitled to.

Workers voted by 85.5% in favour of strikes on an 86.1% turnout. This is a massive turnout and “yes” vote well above the new minimum turnout of 50% for industrial action ballots. The balloted workers are at two depots, one in Huddersfield and one in Dewsbury.

The ballot followed management’s failure to keep promises, made over six months ago, to look into long-running issues of bullying and harassment. Some bin workers have over 10 months’ hol-



Kirklees bin workers on strike in 2012

iday to take and no chance of taking it. Workers also report not being able to take compassionate leave or look after sick relatives and children.

Paul Holmes, Kirklees Unison Branch Secretary, said “workers don’t take strike action lightly – going on strike is a serious business and a great deal of ‘soul-searching’ is involved. Our members have families, dependants and some are carers. But how long can you put up with bullying every day? At

some stage you have to say ‘enough is enough’. The bin workers have reached that stage”.

Unison named 14 days of strikes starting on 4 June. However Kirklees council, a Council which Labour won the majority in May’s election, have now promised an investigation into the bullying and harassment as well as levels of cover.

Unison has suspended the strike action pending the outcome of this investigation.

Picturehouse strikes at Sundance festival

By Gemma Short

Picturehouse workers will be on strike again for the Sundance film festival happening at Picturehouse Central from 31 May to 3 June.

They will be striking during the opening night on Thursday 31 May, and again on Saturday 2 May. The strikes will hit several premières taking place at the festival.

Workers will hold picket lines from 17:30-20:30 each night, and welcome supporters to join them.

UoL’s vague promises

Outsourced workers at the University of London are disappointed after a much delayed announcement from the University about bringing workers in-house has failed to give workers any real commitment.

Workers organised by the IWGB union previously struck on 25-26 April, and will strike again on 6 June, in a campaign to be brought

back in-house and have parity of terms and conditions with in-house workers. Outsourced workers currently receive inferior pensions, and less holiday, sick, maternity and paternity pay.

The university’s vague statement gives no clear commitments to bringing workers in-house and no timetable on taking more action.



PCS to ballot on pay

By Charlotte Zalens

PCS members voted at their Annual Conference, taking place in Brighton from 22-24 May, to ballot members across the civil service for national strikes on pay.

An emergency motion from the union’s National Executive instructing the executive to “organise a statutory ballot of members in the civil service and its related bodies on a programme of industrial action involving both all

member and targeted action, to be held as soon as possible after Conference” was overwhelmingly carried. And about time too.

PCS held a consultative ballot of members in September-October 2017, but those members have been left waiting until now for the next steps. In order to beat the new anti-union laws the union needs to get organised, and fast.

PCS conference also overwhelmingly passed policy re-affirming the union’s commitment to free movement.

FE strikes win a pay rise

By Peggy Carter

UCU members at Further Education (FE) colleges in Hull, Sandwell, and across London have been on strike over a variety of dates in May over pay and jobs.

As a result of the strike management at Sandwell college have offered a pay rise equating to 6.45% over three years. The deal has been endorsed by UCU, as well as by Unison. The deal also includes an increase in the minimum pay level to bring all workers onto the voluntary Living Wage, and the establishment of a joint working group to look at working practices, including staff well being.

FE colleges can set their own pay rates, though there are recommendations made by the Association of Colleges. The UCU hopes other colleges will follow Sandwell’s lead

and offer pay rises.

UCU members at Bradford college suspended a strike planned for Friday 25 May over job cuts after what UCU said were positive discussions with college management. The college had announced plans to cut 75 jobs as part of a restructuring.

Workers at Hull College struck again on 17 and 18 May in their fight to save 231 full-time equivalent jobs. More strike dates are expected soon.



FCC strike continues

By Will Sefton

Unison members at FCC waste recycling in Hull have voted to continue their strike for sick pay.

Now entering their seventh week of strike action the workers have a gofundme page (bit.ly/2slKoew) to support their strike action.

Hull City Council have made no moves to take the contract in-house despite several senior councillors supporting the pickets.



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Now win abortion rights in N. Ireland

By Gemma Short

On Friday 25 May the people of the Republic of Ireland voted to repeal the "eighth amendment" to the constitution, righting a wrong which for almost 35 years had put women's lives in danger by banning access to abortion even more tightly than it was before under 19th century law.

The vote to repeal was carried by 66.4%, with just Donegal voting not to repeal. Opinion polls have shown majorities in favour of repeal for several years. However the organisation and mobilisation by the anti-choice lobby for the referendum was substantial. It makes the large majority for repeal a very significant victory.

The eighth amendment enshrined in law equal status between a foetus and woman and resulted in the ban on abortion in Ireland becoming almost total.

Medical professionals felt unable to act even when a woman's life was in danger. Technically the repeal will not legalise or decriminalise any abortion in Ireland, but it does lay the basis for further legislation which will legalise abortion, to which the amendment was previously a block.

The Irish government says it intends to follow votes from the Citizens Assembly in 2017 and legislate for abortion, without restriction, up until 12 weeks. While Ireland would have a significantly lower time limit than other countries where abortion is legal, it would not have other restrictions such as the need for women to get permission from two doctors, as is the case in the UK.

The referendum result was greeted with cheers, tears, and chants of "yes, yes, yes" and "Savita, Savita, Savita" by crowds throughout Ireland.

The memory of Savita Halappanavar played a significant role in forcing through a referendum and winning the campaign. Savita lost her life when, at 17 weeks pregnant, she suffered a miscarriage. Despite being told by doctors that the foetus would not survive, she was refused an abortion while there was still a foetal heartbeat. Savita and her family were forced to go through the agony of waiting days for the heartbeat to stop. As a result of that wait she contracted an infection which led to septicæmia and her death. A subsequent investigation concluded that confusion over the eighth amendment was a contributing factor in her death.

A mural of Savita in Dublin was by the time the result was announced on 26 May covered in handwritten messages taped to the wall. One message read: "Sorry we were too late. But we are here now. We didn't forget you."

The "In her shoes" stories published during the campaign highlighted the significance of women being denied basic medical care in winning the referendum. Such stories demonstrated the way Irish society treated pregnant women — more as vessels for pregnancies than as human beings.

Women, fed up of decades of discrimination, of abuse in the Catholic Church, of rape, of Magdalene laundries, of being made to feel shame, of hushed-up journeys to England, voted for change. For "never again". On the day of the vote social media was filled with



stories of mothers and daughters, and in some cases grandmothers, mothers, and daughters, going to vote "repeal" together.

On Sunday 27 May stories were shared on social media of priests announcing from the pulpit, at the first Mass after the referendum, that "yes" voters were not welcome, people got up and walked out.

This rolling back of the power of the Catholic Church in Irish society is a good thing, and long overdue.

The #HomeToVote movement played an important role in the referendum. Women, mainly young, who have left Ireland in recent years made journeys home — consciously connecting their journeys with those of women forced to travel to access abortion... and thousands helped them fundraise for their plane tickets.

Many in the crowd outside Dublin Castle carried placards saying "the north will be next". They are right; the referendum result in

the Republic of Ireland will act as a catalyst for change in Northern Ireland, the only part of the UK where women cannot access abortion "at home". Some have called for a similar referendum in Northern Ireland, but no such referendum is necessary. All that is needed is for the 1967 Abortion Act to be extended to Northern Ireland.

The 1967 Abortion Act also needs to be changed. We need to get rid of the two doctor rule and the restriction of reasons for termination, and the qualification that "continuing the pregnancy would involve greater risk than termination to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any of her existing children".

This historic vote vastly improve the lives of women in Ireland, in the long run in the whole of the island of Ireland, and will act as a beacon of hope for those fighting for abortion rights in other parts of the world.

M, a Polish feminist activist, comments

In the feminist movement in Poland there was a lot of joy and celebration [at the result].

But some people saying that it was a step too far... There is a difference of opinion in the Polish women's movement: some people want to stop the government's attacks, and aren't convinced about extending abortion rights much further. The influence of the Catholic Church is very great. (I know Polish atheists in Poland who christen their children because the stigma of being unbaptised is so great.)

But Poland will be one of the last islands in Europe where abortion is not legal. Because Poland has been trying to catch up with Western Europe, and we don't want to be perceived as a backward country, a change in mentality is taking place. But I don't think this present government will take any steps to legalise abortion. After the next election we will have a shot at discussing it further.

The Polish feminist movement was awakened because the government wanted to restrict abortion rights even further. But the movement of women who support full legalisation of abortion is not a majority.

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Printed by Trinity Mirror